

Schatz	Stabenow	Warnock
Schumer	Sullivan	Warren
Shaheen	Tester	Whitehouse
Sinema	Van Hollen	Wyden
Smith	Warner	

NAYS—46

Barrasso	Graham	Portman
Blackburn	Grassley	Risch
Blunt	Hagerty	Romney
Boozman	Hawley	Rubio
Braun	Hoeven	Sasse
Burr	Hyde-Smith	Scott (FL)
Capito	Inhofe	Scott (SC)
Cassidy	Johnson	Shelby
Cornyn	Kennedy	Thune
Cotton	Lankford	Tillis
Cramer	Lee	Toomey
Crapo	Lummis	Tuberville
Cruz	Marshall	Wicker
Daines	McConnell	Young
Ernst	Moran	
Fischer	Paul	

NOT VOTING—1

Rounds

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HICKENLOOPER). On this vote, the yeas are 53, the nays are 46.

The motion is agreed to.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of David M. Prouty, of Maryland, to be a Member of the National Labor Relations Board for the term of five years expiring August 27, 2026.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

EGYPT

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, rightfully, this body is consumed with pending votes on infrastructure, but I want to draw my colleagues' attention to another matter of both importance and urgency.

One of Vladimir Putin's favorite tactics during the Chechen rebellion was to kidnap the innocent relatives of rebel leaders and hold them captive until the leaders surrendered. Sometimes, if the rebel leader never gave himself up, the family members would just disappear forever. Thousands of these cases were documented over the course of the war, all in gross, blatant violation of human rights laws. It is one of the many reasons that Russia is an adversary, not an ally of the United States. We don't do business with nations that prey upon the innocent. We don't align ourselves with nations that use kidnapping or torture as a tool to stay in power.

A few months ago, Moustafa Soltan and Khairi Soltan were startled by a hard knock on their door in the wee hours of a February Sunday morning. It was the Egyptian authorities, there to detain them again simply because their cousin happened to be a man named Mohamed Soltan, an American citizen and vocal Egyptian human rights advocate. Rightly, Moustafa and Khairi were not surprised because for the past year, the Soltan family has been the subject of consistent, coordinated harassment and detention by the agents of Egyptian dictator Abdelfattah Elsis. Now, Sisi would probably argue that he uses the tactic of harassing and detaining family members of his political opponents in a more judicious manner than does Vladimir Putin, but he can't deny that he does it. He further cannot deny the systematic method by which he has used the judicial system in Egypt to eliminate his political opposition.

Now, a reliable estimate is hard to come by because the political arrests have come at a dizzying pace since 2013, but it is believed that there are 60,000 people in jail today in Egypt because they are political opponents of the Sisi government.

Now, Putin jails his political adversaries, too, but his number of around 400 doesn't come close to Sisi's. But that is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the Egyptian regime's treatment of political opponents. Only China and Iran execute more people every year than Egypt, and many of these executions are for political crimes. Journalists are currently under constant threat in Egypt. The country rates 166 out of 180 by the press freedom group Reporters Without Borders compared against other nations.

In the 2018 Presidential election, Sisi had his main opponent arrested and had his campaign manager beaten up, causing all the other credible candidates to drop out of the race. Shockingly, Sisi won with 97 percent of the vote. That same year, Putin was less greedy. He gave himself only 70 percent in his Presidential election.

So why, you might ask, is Egypt our partner and Russia our adversary if their behavior is so malignantly similar? Why does Russia get sanctioned and Egypt get showered with \$1.3 billion in military aid each year?

Now, yes, there are important lines of cooperation between Egypt and the United States, and this explains some of that difference. Egypt's 1979 peace treaty with Israel remains one of the most significant diplomatic achievements for the promotion of Arab-Israeli peace. For the last 40 years, Egypt has been a peace broker between the Israelis and the Palestinians. We rely on them historically. Egypt contributed forces to the first gulf war in 1990. The United States and Egypt often cooperate on counterterrorism work. Our ships often get preference in going through the Suez Canal, although we pay for that privilege.

All that is important, but none of it is enough to justify the damage done to U.S. power and prestige when the whole world watches America deliver this giant blank check each year to Egypt while Sisi engages in this repeated, brazen violation of human rights. How do you tell Russia and China to stop their campaigns of political repression when we so openly endorse the grandiose scale of Sisi's?

No, Egypt has come to believe that it can act any way that it wants, that it can carry out a massive campaign of political repression and that the Con-

gress and the American President, whether he be a Republican or a Democrat, will just keep the money coming. And it is a stunning amount of money. The \$1.3 billion security assistance package that Egypt gets every year from U.S. taxpayers is bested by only one other country in the world, and that is Israel.

Most outrageous of all in light of this policy, Egypt arrests and imprisons American citizens with near impunity. Mohamed Soltan is not the only Egyptian American to be arrested and tortured as a political prisoner. Mustafa Kassem from Long Island, NY, was arrested in 2013 while visiting family, just visiting family in Cairo. He died in an Egyptian prison in January of last year. There have been dozens of other American citizens.

It is unacceptable that we would be providing over \$1 billion in assistance to Egypt while they are holding a single American in prison for political crimes. When countries accept our money and continue to thumb their noses at our values, it makes America look like a patsy. It makes us weaker as a nation.

So many of us cheered when President Biden took office declaring that there would now be "a foreign policy that unites our democratic values with our diplomatic leadership, and one that is centered on the defense of democracy and the protection of human rights." President Biden's team has been outspoken on human rights in our foreign policy by calling out abusive dictatorships who imprison their critics and muzzle free speech, reuniting our democratic allies in Europe against Russian election interference and Chinese misinformation, and sanctioning corrupt oligarchs all over the world. That is great news.

The Biden administration has chosen to make democracy and human rights a priority because they see this coming fight between Chinese- and Russian-modeled autocracy and American-led democracy. And over the last 4 years, Donald Trump's affection for dictatorship, it gave our adversaries in the autocratic world a headstart. President Biden knows the future of the world depends on our willingness as a nation to take a strong, immediate stand right now for democracy everywhere.

And so let's be clear. An administration that wants to lead on democracy and human rights cannot send another \$1.3 billion to Egypt with no strings attached. To do so would be to endorse Sisi's crackdown and send a bright, blinking message to the world that America talks a big game on democracy but isn't willing to do much about it.

Luckily, Joe Biden doesn't have to take the heat when it comes to a change in Egypt policy. He can simply blame Congress and tell Sisi that he is just upholding the law.

Why?

For more than a decade, Congress has been conditioning some of the aid we

give to Egypt on its human rights record, hoping that if we tied a portion of the \$1.3 billion to things like holding free and fair elections, or releasing political prisoners, allowing the media space to operate, that the Egyptian Government would make progress.

But nearly every single year, the State Department waives those conditions and just gives Egypt the money, even when the conditions aren't close to being met. Only once—and I will give them credit for this—in 2017, Secretary Tillerson cut \$95 million and temporarily held up another \$195 million of Egypt's aid money, but even that \$195 million was released before all the conditions were met.

Never has the State Department just said the obvious: The conditions weren't met. We are not going to waive them. You are not getting the money.

And we are talking about a portion of the money, this year, \$300 million of the \$1.3 billion.

It is painfully clear that the lesson Egypt has learned over the years is a simple one: America is not serious about human rights, and so we don't need to invest in improvements; we are going to get the money anyway.

This year, Congress has said that the Secretary of State should withhold \$300 million of military aid to Egypt if Sisi doesn't substantially reverse his campaign of political repression and intimidation. What we know, unequivocally, is that no meaningful progress has been made. The latest arrests of Mohamed Soltan's family were done in February of this year. That was kind of like a thumb in the eye of the new administration and the new Congress.

Like clockwork every year, right before the annual waiver is given by the State Department, Egypt normally does release a few of the most egregiously detained prisoners or announces some minor change in policy, but it is always window dressing. The trend from year to year is always the same: more human rights violations, more intimidation, less free speech, less democracy.

This year, the United States must withhold the \$300 million, in accordance with the law passed by this Congress. It will send a message to Egypt that we are serious about reform and, maybe more importantly, it will send a message to the world that we are willing to walk the walk, not just talk the talk.

Now, this town freaks out whenever the security assistance gravy train goes off the rails, even for a moment. Keeping the pipeline of American arms flowing to brutal regimes, it makes a lot of people rich in Washington. And those people are whispering in the ears of Congress and the administration right now, making the claim, as they do every single year, that the sky is going to fall if Egypt doesn't get its \$1.3 billion—all of it, all of the \$1.3 billion—as they have every year since 1987. They will say that all the lines of cooperation that I mentioned earlier will disappear.

But in reality, the return on investment for our military aid to Egypt, it has been diminishing for a long time now. And there is no reason that the things that we get from Egypt—Suez access, overflight rights, continued upholding of the peace treaty with Israel—will be overturned should they get only \$1 billion rather than \$1.3 billion this year.

Why is that?

Well, because in 1987, those benefits Egypt provides were arguably concessions to our requests. But, today, Egypt does those things not because we pay them to do it, but because they have their own reasons to do them.

For years, the United States looked the other way while another regional power, Saudi Arabia, carried out its own dizzying campaign of repression against its own people. We did virtually nothing. We said virtually nothing. Instead, we rewarded Saudi Arabia with record amounts of armed sales. And then one day, they kidnapped a U.S. resident and they chopped him to pieces. And America was made a fool in the eyes of the world, and, in some ways, we have had a hard time recovering from that day.

Mohamed Soltan, just like Jamal Khashoggi, believes that there is no other nation in the world that cares more about standing up for democracy and civil rights than America. Egypt doesn't care. They harass and imprison his relatives at will—the relatives of a high-profile American citizen—because they can. Let's not make the same mistake with Egypt that we made with Saudi Arabia.

Egypt notices when we talk tough and do nothing, so does the rest of the world. And so withholding \$300 million of their \$1.3 billion until Egypt makes real concessions on reform, it won't fundamentally harm U.S. interests in the Middle East. It will only make us more safe.

It is the best opportunity for the Biden administration to show that we mean it when we say that the stakes in the fight between autocracy and democracy are sky high and that we are willing to do more than just talk about our values. America has the capacity to live them as well.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, it was 1 week ago that the Senate held a procedural vote on a bill that hadn't even been written. And to no one's surprise, it failed.

Republicans, for our part, said it made no sense to advance to a more than \$1 trillion infrastructure plan before knowing what was in the plan and how it would be paid for.

Our Democratic colleagues argued that the big text was imminent, coming any moment, any second, and it was critical to get the process started.

Well, here we are, 1 week later. I guess the bill text wasn't imminent because we still haven't seen it yet.

Earlier today, we heard that there was an agreement, I assume in principle, on the major portions of the proposed plan, which I concede is a major sign of progress. I want to commend all of our colleagues, including Senators PORTMAN, COLLINS, ROMNEY, and CASIDY, who have been working hard on our side of the aisle to achieve consensus, and on the Democratic side, Senators like Senator MANCHIN and SINEMA and others.

But this infrastructure plan that we haven't seen yet is no more ready for action today on the floor than it was last week. We made clear last week that we wanted to see the details before voting on a trillion-dollar bill that will impact every community across this country.

Until this bill is actually written and we have a chance to review it, including all the details, the costs, the pay-fors, and the impact it will have on our States, I will not support it. And I imagine the majority of my Republican colleagues feel the same way.

Now, I say that also believing that it is important for us to get a bipartisan infrastructure bill. I actually want us to. But part of the challenge is these groups of gangs that operate outside of what we would call regular order here; that is, the committees of jurisdiction, where all Senators get to participate in the final product, including on the floor of the Senate, that is really not possible when you have a group—a small group, a subset of the Senate negotiating a deal among themselves, and then they present it to us as a fait accompli and say: You have to accept it.

Well, it doesn't work very well, ordinarily, but I am willing to give them a chance because I know they have committed a lot of time and effort into this. But it is going to depend on a couple of things. My vote, ultimately, is going to depend on a couple of things.

First of all, we fund our highways, our roads, and bridges mainly through the gas tax. That is the amount of money that goes into the gallon of gas that is dedicated for the highway trust fund. Well, because our cars are getting more mileage now and because we are seeing alternatives, like electric vehicles, the highway trust fund is simply inadequate to fund the demand of our infrastructure: roads and bridges and the like.

But that is no excuse for us to get away from what has heretofore been a pay-for model or a user-fee model. In other words, infrastructure should be paid for by the people who use it, not people who don't use it. And that is why the gas tax, at least as originally conceived, made a lot of sense.

But we made a couple of mistakes. One, we didn't index it to inflation. And, secondly, we just couldn't account, back when the gas tax was adopted, for the innovation we have seen in transportation—natural gas-driven vehicles, electric vehicles, and the like—that pay nothing for our roads and infrastructure.